



Women of De Anza in STEM

CAMPUS LIFE: DESPITE GENDER DISCREPANCIES IN THE FIELD, WOMEN STEP FORWARD

PHOTO BY MATTHEW FERNANDEZ

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Students claim victory in Eco-Pass battle



PHOTO BY KUNAL MEHTA

De Anza students fill up the VTA board meeting room with posters and prepared speeches to lobby against raising the Eco-Pass fee to \$40.

Kunal Mehta
NEWS EDITOR

The VTA board voted to raise the community college Eco-Pass fee to only \$20 and keep it at that price for the next four years, following months of lobbying by De Anza College student activists. VTA's original proposal was to raise the fee up to \$40 in chunks of \$5 per year.

30 students attended the meeting, many carrying signs protesting the fee increase, and nearly 20 spoke during the public comment period.

> SEE: ECO-PASS, P.3

Eco-Pass fare increase capped at \$20 for four years at all community colleges

> FROM: ECO-PASS, P.1

"It sets the right precedent. It's a huge symbolic gesture, and it essentially says that 'we're not for price increases for students'," Neil McClintick, 20, political science major, said.

Patrick Ahrens, advisor to California Assemblymember Evan Low and De Anza alumnus, assisted the students with organizing and working with board members, and noted how the students' efforts benefitted all community colleges.

"You did a great job in terms of being a regional leader... saying 'we want equity', which is what we aspired for," Ahrens said when speaking to students after the meeting. "I'm really proud of you guys. You guys did a great job."

Mission-West Valley currently pays \$18 a year and will only see a \$2 increase for the next four years.

Students lobbied VTA board members in the month prior to the meeting with phone banks organized by the De Anza Political Revolution club.

"We received many phone calls and emails regarding the increase to the Eco Pass," VTA board



PHOTO BY KUNAL MEHTA

Neil McClintick, 20, political science major, and Patrick Ahrens, advisor to California Assemblymember Evan Low, strategize during the board meeting.

member Johnny Khamis said at the beginning of the discussion regarding the Eco Pass.

De Anza students created a counter-proposal that asked for a direct increase of \$20 and would be locked in for eight years. This proposal was the basis of a motion

proposed by VTA board member Ken Yeager, but his proposal only locked in the fare for four years.

"I can see from all the passion, that an increase [from \$9] is really important to these people," VTA board member Rob Rennie said.

"I don't think the difference is

material," VTA Chief Financial Officer Raj Srinath said on the financial impact of Yeager's motion. The motion passed with the only opposition coming from Cindy Chavez, who opposed due to the increase in fees to senior citizens.

The general counsel of the VTA noted that the four year price lock only restricts VTA staff from raising fees, and that future VTA boards could decide to increase fees.

"I am a little wary that they will bring this back in two years," Ahrens said. He said students who are remaining at De Anza for the next year should remain vigilant in ensuring the VTA board keeps their word.

Other changes to the pass include the removal of the express bus, and an additional \$3 fee for the clipper cards themselves.

"I've heard a lot about the future of the VTA, but I hope you understand, we are the future of this valley," Student Trustee Elias Kamal said.

De Anza students will still need to approve of the \$11 fare increase in an election.

Passionate student testimony convinces board members

"Eastside San Jose is predominantly 44.5 percent Hispanic, compared to Cupertino's 5.1 percent. We say segregation doesn't exist in 2017, but then why do so many of our marginalized youth demographic travel significant distances just to enroll in one of the top-ranked community colleges of this nation?"

-Antonio Castillo, 19, sociology major

"On top of taking a full load of classes and being involved in two clubs, I also have a job to help my family stay afloat. I am one of thousands who rely on the Eco-Pass and fear the proposed prices for my family's well-being. This past month I've been working day and night fighting for affordable transportation for fellow students..."

-April Nicholson, 19, political science major

Administration absent

Kunal Mehta
NEWS EDITOR

VTA board members questioned the lack of attendance and communication from De Anza College administration during Thursday's board meeting.

VTA Deputy Director Finance & Budget, Ali Hudda, said that they had emailed the De Anza Eco-Pass coordinator Dennis Shannakian twice, but never received a response.

"That seems kind of odd to me. So what you're saying is that De Anza won't even return our phone calls?" VTA board member Johnny Khamis said. He then asked, "Are there any

administrators from De Anza here in the audience tonight? Anybody?" and was met with silence.

Student Trustee Elias Kamal apologized on behalf of the administration during the public comment period, and said that President Brian Murphy had sent a letter to all the board members expressing his opposition to increasing Eco-Pass fees.

Eco-Pass Poll



GRAPHIC BY L.E. ASHLEY

- May 2: Student activists begin circulating a petition against the fare increase.
- May 4: Students attend VTA board meeting and protest against fare increase.
- May 11: The De Anza Political Revolution Club hosts a phone bank to call VTA board members.
- May 12: Students meet with VTA board member and Mayor of Cupertino Savita Vaidhyathan, and obtain her support.
- May 17: Students meet with VTA board member and San Jose City councilmember Chappie Jones, who asks for a counter-proposal.
- May 18: The De Anza Political Revolution Club hosts a second phone bank.
- May 24: De Anza petition reaches 2,000 signatures.
- May 26: Students meet with Assembly member Ash Kalra, and obtain his support.
- May 30: Congressman Ro Khanna publicly opposes the Eco-Pass fare increase, and endorses students' efforts.
- June 1: VTA board members agree to cap Eco-Pass fee increase at \$20 for four years at all community colleges.
- May 23: A student meets with VTA board member Raul Perez.
- May 24: Students meet with VTA Deputy Director Finance & Budget Ali Hudda, who supported the fare increase.
- May 30: Students meet with De Anza vice president Finance and College Operations, Susan Cheu.
- May 31: President Brian Murphy sends a letter to the VTA board in opposition of raising the Eco-Pass fare.
- May 26: Students meet with VTA board member Cindy Chavez.
- May 30: The Amalgamated Transit Union Local 265 (bus drivers) endorses the students' efforts.
- May 24: Students meet VTA board member Chappie Jones again, present counter-proposal.

